

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 13, 2015

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MARCH 26, 2015

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2015–16 REGULAR SESSION

## ASSEMBLY BILL

**No. 75**

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### Introduced by Assembly Member Mathis

January 5, 2015

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An act relating to veterans, and making an appropriation therefor.

#### LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 75, as amended, Mathis. Veterans.

Existing law, the Budget Act of 2014, appropriates \$3,000,000 to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose of assisting the United States Department of Veterans Affairs in processing veterans' claims.

This bill would ~~extend the authorization to encumber or expend that \$3,000,000 until June 30, 2020. By extending the Department of Veterans Affairs' authority to expend funds, the bill would make an appropriation~~ appropriate \$3,000,000 to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose of funding those Veteran Claims Representative positions.

Vote:  $\frac{2}{3}$ . Appropriation: yes. Fiscal committee: yes.  
State-mandated local program: no.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

- 1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares:
- 2 (a) The Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) works to serve
- 3 California veterans and their families. With nearly two million
- 4 veterans living in the state, CalVet strives to ensure that its veterans

1 of every era and their families receive the state and federal benefits  
2 and services they have earned and deserve as a result of their  
3 selfless and honorable military service. CalVet strives to serve  
4 veterans and their families with dignity and compassion and to  
5 help them achieve their highest quality of life.

6 (b) In 2013, *the Legislature and Governor Jerry Brown*  
7 ~~introduced a budget that~~ authorized \$3 million and 36 limited-term  
8 positions that allowed CalVet to coordinate with the United States  
9 Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to assist in reducing its  
10 massive veterans' claims ~~backlog~~. *backlog in the three California*  
11 *VA Regional Offices.*

12 (c) The funds appropriated were used to hire a "Strike Force"  
13 ~~team~~ *three teams* of 12 Veterans Claims Representatives (VCR)  
14 (VCR), *one team* for each of the VA's regional offices in the Cities  
15 of Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego to focus on backlogged  
16 claims, ensuring they are properly developed and have all necessary  
17 documentation needed for adjudication.

18 (d) At the time the CalVet Strike Teams were initially deployed  
19 in the Fall of 2013, the national average wait time for benefits from  
20 the federal government was 349.6 days. This meant the average  
21 veteran waited nearly a year before receiving benefits that ~~are~~  
22 ~~considered a right~~. *they had earned through their honorable*  
23 *military service.* The average wait times in the Cities of Los  
24 Angeles and Oakland were significantly worse than the national  
25 average, at 619.4 days and 617.8 days, respectively.

26 (e) As of January 29, 2015, CalVet Strike Team claims review  
27 efforts in the Cities of Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego ~~have~~  
28 ~~reviewed including reviewing~~ 44,921 claims, resulting in *one-time*  
29 lump sum payments to California veterans totaling \$45,603,451,  
30 monthly award payments totaling \$5,878,940, ~~and an annual~~  
31 ~~monthly awards payment total~~ *which result in annualized award*  
32 *payments* of \$70,547,276 going to California veterans every year  
33 for the rest of their lives.

34 (f) While the Strike Teams have done remarkable work, the  
35 mission is still not complete as the VA is still not on pace to fully  
36 eliminate ~~their~~ *its* claims backlog by the end of next year, a goal  
37 long promised by ~~department~~ *the VA* officials.

38 (g) *Whereas the Strike Teams have addressed the initial claims*  
39 *backlog for the VA's three regional offices in California, the*  
40 *appeals of claims decisions and the dependent claims have been*

1 *pushed back and will remain unresolved for many months, if not*  
2 *years, should the Strike Team positions are not further funded.*

3 *(h) It is the intent of the Legislature to provide the CalVet with*  
4 *the requisite staff to review and ensure quality, timeliness, and*  
5 *accuracy of claims filed on behalf of the veterans of California*  
6 *and their families.*

7 ~~(g)~~

8 *(i) California veterans have served their country and their*  
9 *communities with honor and distinction, and deserve the benefits*  
10 *that have been promised to them.*

11 ~~SEC. 2. Three million dollars (\$3,000,000) of the amount~~  
12 ~~appropriated in Item 8955-001-0001 of Section 2.0 of the Budget~~  
13 ~~Act of 2014 (Chapter 25 of the Statutes of 2014), as referenced in~~  
14 ~~Provision 5 of that item, shall be available for encumbrance or~~  
15 ~~expenditure until June 30, 2020, after which it shall revert to the~~  
16 ~~General Fund.~~

17 *SEC. 2. The sum of three million dollars (\$3,000,000) is hereby*  
18 *appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose*  
19 *of permanently funding 36 full-time equivalent Veterans Claims*  
20 *Representative positions in the Department of Veterans Affairs'*  
21 *Veteran Services Division. These 36 Veterans Claims*  
22 *Representatives shall have oversight by the California Department*  
23 *of Veterans Affairs, and ensure the quality and timeliness of claims*  
24 *filed through the federal Department of Veterans Affairs on behalf*  
25 *of California veterans and their families.*